

# ENGLAND

IN THE

## AGE OF WYCLIFFE

### CHAPTEE I

#### *WAR AND GOVERNMENT, 1S68-1SW*

THE LOSS OF OUR FKENCH POSSESSIONS.  
JOHN OF GAUNT AND HIS  
FRIENDS

THE reader who has turned to a history of Chaucer's times in hope of finding record of the healthy national life suggested by the picture of the jolly poet's companions on the Canterbury pilgrimage, will be disappointed that no aspect of politics or of society reproduces the cheerful impression he had received. But if his zeal for letters or antiquity has carried him through some cantos of Piers Plowman's gloomy and powerful utterances against the same generation, he will be less surprised to find that the chief feature is the decay of those institutions and ideas that had governed mediaeval England throughout the Plantagenet epoch, and the collapse of the old methods, industrial, social, military, governmental and religious. Yet the gloom of the period is not unrelieved ; historical dulness does not brood over it as it often broods over periods of national decline. The personalities of Wycliffe and Chaucer adorn and humanise the story. The most spontaneous and general uprising of the working classes that ever took place in England, gives to the labour-question that picturesqueness and reality, which are too often lacking in the most important chapters of national development\* Above